Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NATIONALISM IN ART

American and English critics do love to talk about American art. They tell us just what it ought to be about, and how it should be presented. They are constantly on the *qui vive* to detect foreign ideas and alien interests, and even if forced to admit good work in something possessing these baneful qualities, they are sure to heave a sigh, and deplore the fact that it is "un-American."

It would seem that the only thing to cure critics of this attitude would be a course in psychology. It is not so surprising that English critics, ignorant of our civilization, and of the vastness of our country and its many and various intellectual reactions, should erect a spurious ideal of what literature here should be. But that our own critics should persist in demanding a narrow and purely surface "Americanism" is more astonishing.

To their minds "Americanism" would seem to consist of a mixture of trade-unionism, slums (neither of which phenomena, it may be remarked, is peculiar to this country), polyethnic factories, and limitless prairies peopled by heroic cow-boys. This would appear to be a rather narrow range in which to confine the art of a great nation. For we are a great nation, and that supremely interesting thing, a nation in the making. Is our lack of a correspondingly great art due to our youth, or to other, and more artificial, causes?

To all people who find art a worthy preoccupation and endeavor, this question is one of paramount interest. What can we do to get ourselves worthily down on canvas or

paper? How can we produce that concourse of great artists which the critics are always fuming at us for not possessing? How angry they would be if we suggested that they were one of the obstacles which stand in the way, that this constant talk and urging on the subject of "Americanism" was one of the surest ways not to get it. We have gone daft in this country on the "social," we speak of people as though their only value were in the aggregate. We pounce upon individualism with jeers, and sneers, and misunderstanding. Universal suffrage works as badly in the domain of the arts as it does in Wall Street. In fact, it undoubtedly works worse. For there are many more able business men than there are able artists, so the public may very well be supposed to have an apter judgment in business affairs than in letters. Not that the public is not a good judge of results. The "man in the street" can see the difference between a great financier and the keeper of the corner grocery. And great artists attain their rank through universal (though not always popular) opinion. Certainly the public sees results, but the public is not a very good judge of how results are to be come by.

Art is a thing of the individual. It is all very well to group by-gone artists into schools for class-room convenience. It amuses a certain type of mind to fasten tags upon living men. It interests readers and stimulates their curiosity to line artists up in opposing factions like the two sides of a base-ball game. But these are purely exterior phenomena and leave the profound individuality of the artist untouched. So shy and unaccountable is the creative impulse that it has

so far defied the researches of psychologists. It depends upon a number of physical and mental phenomena, worked upon by environment. And it is this subtle, elusive, and awe-inspiring thing which the critics are so anxious to push here and there!

A nation is its character, just as a man is. Personality is made up of all sorts of traits and habits, cross-sectioning and inhibiting each other. It is in its essence, in the kind of character a man has, that his national character comes out. It is stupid and impertinent to be forever telling a man to try and be someone else. The American artist must first of all be encouraged to be himself, and by being himself openly and fearlessly he will also be entirely American. In fact, he could not help it if he would. We are a nation with marked characteristics; there is no lack of national flavor about us. That we do not get it into our literature is because of another national trait—we are conventional, hopelessly, timidly so. All the intellectual revolts and movements come from abroad. But, and here is the point, American artists living abroad are usually in the van of such movements. Whistler led one of the most important artistic reforms of our time, and one of the best known of the French symbolists is Stuart Merrill, an American. No, we are not stupid, and not incapable of the seething intellectual force which makes for change, but here at home we live in an atmosphere of stuffy monotony, and the critics, who should be our teachers and helpers, are forever asking us to mold ourselves on one pattern.

No other country has treated its artists so. Other countries have realized that in the richness and many-sidedness of artistic achievement lies the greatness of national artistic life.

Musicians speak of the "attack" with which a singer takes a note. National character is shown in this quality of "attack," the way an artist takes a subject, the fluid play of his personality about it. Let us show a little more trust in our artists, let us believe that they know what is good for themselves better than we do. And when an American artist, with all the force and vitality of his go-ahead American nature, braves the scorn of the critics and lays a beautiful pomegranate before us, let us not weep or scold because it is not a rice pudding.

Poe and Walt Whitman share the honor of being America's greatest poets. And what a difference! How unlike are the subjects which inspired them, and how utterly unlike their forms of "attack." But it is quite obvious to the most casual reader that neither of them could have come out of any country except America. It is the fashion to call Poe an exotic. Why? Because there has only been one of him? Could he have been an Englishman, a Frenchman, a German? Clearly he has none of the national traits of these, or any other foreign countries. It must be then because he is a genius that we fail to see the American in him. Is it not a little sad that genius is so rare with us that when it appears we dub it "exotic?"

No, what the American artist needs to be told is to be himself. And to spare no study to present that self as it

really is. If a poet chooses the ancient Aztec civilization as the background for a poem, it may be as purely "American" a production as though he had laid his scene in the lower East Side of New York at the present day. If he chooses to people the Kentucky woods with fairies, who are we to bar out the fine play of his imagination as alien to our national temper? And is it not a little ludicrous, perhaps pathetic, to have a reviewer upbraid him because he has not chosen to write about the laborers on the adjacent farms? What reviewers of that type do not understand is, that neither poet nor painter chooses his subject. It is the subject which chooses him; he can no more help his preferences and inspirations than he can help the shape of his head.

These unscientifically trained reviewers seem to think that a man decides what is to ignite his creative impulse as wilfully and calmly as he would choose a number at a roulette table; and, the subject taken, they speak as though the rest were chance. A profound ignorance of psychic laws is responsible for these ideas. The fact would seem to be just the reverse. An artist cannot choose his number, but he can learn to spin his wheel. We are afraid to go to school lest we cease to be ourselves. A strong man gains an added sense of power by everything he learns. Every great artist has spent a life of laborious learning. He has mastered his technique with infinite pains, and by so doing has been able to fling his personality unimpeded before the world. The only motto for a serious artist is: WORK! Instead of begging us to be what we are not, the critics

should urge us to be more fully what we are. Only so will they hasten the day when America will have the great artists for which she clamors. *Amy Lowell.*

REVIEWS

Des Imagistes: An Anthology. The Glebe: A. & C. Boni.

Imagism is essentially a graphic art, and, like the finest etching, print or wood-cut, depends upon a highly cultivated state of appreciation in the observer. It is not an art of the naive or unsophisticated. A great many of the classical poems of the Japanese are also graphic in the sense in which I use it here. Their poems exist independently, it is true, of the pictures that they were designed to accompany, or that were made, in their turn, to complete the text of the poet; but the spirit of the poem was based upon this dual appreciation. In other words, it was based upon a mental image to which more than one sense, or more than one art-sense, was contributory. The fact that poet and painter played into each other's hands, so to speak, was due to a more general culture in art than many of us in the west possess, and it was due also to the non-imitative quality of the respective arts. Perhaps this is one reason why the visual element, which plays an important part in the poems in this volume, is not likely to find ready appreciation or understanding.

"An Image," Mr. Pound says, "is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."